

If you want a Biblical example for how to live your last days, there is no shortage. Some longwinded: Moses spoke the whole book of Deuteronomy. Some troubling: Isaac, thinking he was dying, got himself tricked into giving the older son's birthright to the younger - and then didn't actually die, but lived on to see his mistake played out for decades. I choose an obscure, unnamed teenage girl from the little read book of Judges as my model.

Go look it up. I'll wait. **Judges, Chapter 11, verses 30-40**, the story of Jephthah and his daughter. I doubt you read this one in Sunday School, and you can see why. It's nearly impossible to get past what the warrior Jephthah does to find out what his daughter does. Jephthah, desperate to win a battle for his country, offers up a sacrifice of whatever comes out the door first when he gets home in exchange for victory. You see where this will go. Jephthah wins. And of course, his daughter, his only child, comes dancing out with her tambourine to welcome her heroic father home. We all get caught here. The irony of it being his daughter celebrating the victory that seals her death. The idiocy of a father who would make such a bargain, not seeing that God would never ask for such a deal, nor hold him to such a promise. The silence of a God who would let this unfold without intervening with a substitutionary ram, like he did in rescuing Isaac from his father Abraham. It is easy to lose sight of the nameless daughter, the one who sees her death coming, and makes a plan to meet it on her terms. But I can't take my eyes off of Jephthah's daughter. She is my role model.

She doesn't waste a moment asking "why?" She knows it won't change anything. She accepts the inevitable. It is what it is. But then asks, "What can I do with what I've got?" I am not going to waste my last months, or years if I'm lucky, fighting to overturn this sentence. Stage IV metastatic recurrent cancer of the colorectal family is what it is. It wins. What do I want to do in the mean time?

She doesn't mistake what is happening for God's will. God's name gets dragged into it, but it seems pretty clear Jephthah made this mess. And his daughter knows it. She doesn't waste time beating God's door down for answers. If you want to, you can join Job on his ash heap doing that. But I'd rather join Jephthah's daughter up in the hills.

She chooses how she will spend her time. "Give me two months to wander the hills with my friends, to bewail my virginity" - the fact she would never get to be a wife and mother. Her choices said a lot about her. She wanted to step away from her everyday life, and be with the people she loves most and who most love her (I note her father is not invited!). And she wants to use this time to cry with those she's laughed with in the past over the future that is truncated.

I am making the choice of Jephthah's Daughter. June 26 will be my last Sunday, and I will move into incapacity leave. Whether I have two months or two years is not clear. But I want to, need to step away from my everyday responsibilities, spend good time with the people I love best (note, my father is included!), laugh at what we have done together, and mourn what will never be: not that I will never be bishop, or see a novel published, but that I will never snuggle my grandchild's downy head under my chin.

I cannot change what is coming. But I can choose some of how I spend the gift of time I have been given. Jephthah's daughter has shown me the way.